

### **SYRIA (Tier 3)**

Syria is principally a destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of domestic servitude and commercial sexual exploitation. Women from Iraq, Eastern Europe, former Soviet states, Somalia, and Morocco are recruited as cabaret dancers and subsequently forced into prostitution after their employers confiscate their passports and confine them to their work premises. A significant number of women and children in the large Iraqi refugee community in Syria are forced into sexual exploitation by criminal gangs or, in some cases, their families. Some desperate Iraqi families reportedly abandon their girls at the border with the expectation that traffickers on the Syrian side would arrange forged documents for the children and "work" in a nightclub or brothel. Iraqi families arrange for young girls to work in clubs and to be "married," often multiple times, to men for the sole purpose of prostitution. Some Iraqi women and girls who turn to prostitution out of economic desperation are trafficked back into Syria after they are arrested and deported. Syria is becoming a destination for sex tourism by citizens of other Middle Eastern countries, due in part to the influx of Iraqi women and girls exploited in prostitution. Syria is also a transit country for Iraqi women and girls trafficked to Kuwait, the UAE, and Lebanon for forced prostitution.

Some women, mostly from South and Southeast Asia and East Africa, who are recruited to work in Syria as domestic servants are subjected to conditions of involuntary servitude by employers and some of the dozens of recruitment agencies -- many of which are unlicensed -- within Syria. Their work as domestic servants is not covered by Syrian labor law. Contracts signed in the employee's country of origin are often changed upon arrival in Syria, contributing to the employees' vulnerability to forced labor. Some of these women are confined to the residences in which they work, and have their passports confiscated by their employers as a way of restraining their movement. Employers sometimes physically abuse their foreign domestic workers. The Governments of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, East Timor, and the Philippines ban their citizens from accepting employment as domestic workers in Syria, absent enhanced measures to regulate such employment, although this has not stopped the flow of workers into the country.

The Government of Syria does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Syria again did not report any law enforcement efforts to investigate and punish trafficking offenses over the past year. Protection of trafficking victims remained inadequate overall, though the government opened a new shelter in cooperation with IOM in late 2008 and made plans to open a second shelter in 2009. The government made no significant efforts to inform the Syrian public about the practice of human trafficking or to reduce the demand for forced labor -- particularly the forced labor of domestic servants -- or commercial sex acts in Syria. The government has drafted and is reviewing an anti-trafficking law, though it has not made the text public or indicated when the legislation might be enacted.

**Recommendations for Syria:** Enact a law that criminalizes trafficking; investigate, prosecute, and punish offenders; institute a formal procedure to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable groups, such as girls and women found in prostitution, or foreigners detained for lack of immigration documentation, and refer these identified victims to providers of appropriate care; and undertake a campaign to raise public awareness of trafficking.

#### ***Prosecution***

The Government of Syria made no reported efforts to investigate or punish trafficking crimes during the past year, though the government reportedly closed several labor recruitment agencies that may have been involved in recruiting workers through fraudulent means for the purpose of exploitation. Syria continued to lack anti-trafficking

legislation, without which the police were stymied in identifying potential victims and investigating suspected trafficking offenses. During the year, the government showed signs of nascent recognition of Syria's trafficking problem. Anti-trafficking legislation was drafted and reviewed by the Cabinet and Parliament during the year, though it was not passed or enacted. Without an adequate trafficking law, authorities could use existing statutes prohibiting kidnapping, forced prostitution, forced labor, and illegal entry into Syria, to prosecute some trafficking cases; however, there was no evidence that they did so.

The 1961 anti-prostitution law criminalizes bringing a person into the country for the purpose of prostitution, and prohibits prostituting a minor less than 16 years old, with a prescribed penalty of one to seven years' imprisonment. The General Penal Code imposes a three-year prison term and nominal fine for exploitation of prostitution by force, fraud, or coercion. These penalties are not commensurate with the penalties prescribed for rape. Decree 29 of 1970, which regulates immigration, stipulates that "any foreigner who tries to enter the country with false documents and anyone who aided that person is subject to imprisonment of three months to one year." In practice, however, these laws are not targeted toward, or enforced against, traffickers. A 2005 law on money laundering and terrorism financing authorizes prosecution of anyone who receives illicit funds from, *inter alia*, "trading in people," although there is no information indicating that anyone has been prosecuted under this provision.

### **Protection**

During the year, the Syrian government made modest progress in protecting trafficking victims. The government donated building space for a new trafficking shelter opened in Damascus in late 2008, and made plans to open a second shelter in Aleppo later this year. These shelters offer legal and medical services and psychological counseling to victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. Referral of trafficking victims to shelters or NGOs remained informal absent enactment of anti-trafficking legislation or development of a formal anti-trafficking policy. In some cases, Iraqi refugee women who were identified as victims of trafficking were moved from detention facilities to shelters. The government continues to lack formal victim identification procedures to identify potential trafficking victims. As a result, victims of trafficking may have been arrested and charged with prostitution or violating immigration laws. There were reports, however, that some women arrested for prostitution and subsequently identified as victims of trafficking were referred to shelters; this is a positive development. Also, Syrian immigration authorities worked with IOM and foreign embassies to arrange for repatriation of several women, most of whom had escaped from abusive situations as domestic workers. Syria did not actively encourage victims to assist in investigations or prosecutions of their traffickers and did not provide foreign victims with legal alternatives to their removal to countries in which they may face hardship or retribution.

### **Prevention**

During the past year, the government took minimal steps to prevent trafficking. Syria did not conduct any campaigns to educate the public about trafficking, or take any measures to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. Similarly, the government did not undertake any public awareness campaigns against child sex tourism. Together with IOM, the government provided training to Syrian border immigration officials on combating fraudulent documents, which included a trafficking-awareness component. Syria has not ratified the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.